

Kuwait Further Harmonizing With GCC Standards

By Hovaguim Kizirian

Along with other GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) members, Kuwait will have fully implemented a harmonized GCC-wide food standard, including label and shelf-life requirements, by 2006. Other GCC members are Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

In January 2003, the GCC enacted a universal UCL (Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff) for its members. Under the UCL, an across-the-board tariff of 5 percent is applied to almost all imported foods. However, GCC countries are still free of import quotas and other non-tariff barriers.

To expedite transshipments in the GCC, the tariff is being assessed at the point of entry, not at country borders. Since the new rules have taken effect, there have been discrepancies in application of the single entry point policy, but this should be smoothed out soon.

Don't Forget Halal Requirements

Kuwaiti officials will work with companies to avoid disruptions in product entry. They will, for example, pre-approve food product labels to avoid delays.

Food safety regulations are set by the Public Authority for Industry, Kuwait Municipality, MOPH (Ministry of Public Health), Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources and Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research.

Live animals and plants, feedstuffs and horticultural products are inspected at the port of entry, to determine if quarantine is warranted.



All food consignments must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the country of origin. Also, all meat and poultry products must be accompanied by a *halal* slaughter certificate from an approved Islamic center in the country of origin.

Inspection officials routinely check for salmonella in poultry products. Imports of alcoholic beverages and pork, and foods containing these items, are prohibited. So is packaging with images of alcoholic beverages or pork and/or labels containing recipes for these products, even if the imported food contains none. Non-alcoholic beer, referred to as malt beverage, is permitted if the alcoholic content does not exceed 0.05 percent.

Boxes for fresh fruits and vegetables are regulated, but no special packaging type or size is required for other food products, unless incorporated in processed food regulations. Imports of irradiated food products are permitted, as long as labels clearly indicate irradiation.

Kuwait enforces GCC shelf-life standards for 44 food products and recognizes manufacturer-established shelf-life standards for all others. Products not on the list must have half their stated shelf-life remaining to be eligible for entry into GCC markets.

Special food products such as diet, health and infant foods and artificial sweeteners must be pre-registered with the Kuwaiti Nutrition Unit of the MOPH. Labels for these products must include information about ingredients, nutritive value per 100 grams, any health warnings and instructions for proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is permitted.

Regulations governing the use of

food additives are based on Codex Alimentarius standards, as are pesticide and other contaminant residue levels.

Compliance disputes are handled by a committee of representatives from the regulatory agencies and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Stickers Okay for Arabic Labeling

Labels on products can be bilingual, but one language must be Arabic. Arabic stickers are permitted, but there are some provisions to be met: they must adhere well, include all required information, and not cover the original label nor contradict information on the original label.

Label information should include:

- Product and brand name
- Country of origin
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion
- Additives, if any
- Type of animal fat, if applicable
- Net contents in metric units
- Production and expiration dates
- Manufacturer's and/or packer's name and address
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any

As of January 2001, Kuwait is in compliance with the World Trade Organization's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights agreement. Brand registration is recommended to protect both the importer and the foreign supplier against parallel imports and copy-cat labels.

Imports Mostly Through Ports

Food products are imported primarily through the ports of Shuwaikh, located in Kuwait City, and Shuaiba, about 25 miles south of Kuwait City. Fresh and chilled products are often imported by air.

While it can require as little as two or three days to clear a consignment through customs, health clearance can take 7-10 days if laboratory testing is required. Other product requirements can take longer. However, fresh products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival. Once customs clearance is obtained, an importer may store a consignment in a private warehouse, under bond, pending health insurance.

The following documents are required at customs:

- Commercial invoice
- Packing list
- Bill of lading
- Health certificate
- *Halal* slaughter certificate for meat products
- Certificate of origin

The *halal* and country of origin certificates must be notarized by both a local Arab Chamber of Commerce and a Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in the exporting country. ■

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